

# stronger partners, better practices

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from the Local Labour Market  
Partnerships Program

Spring | 2001



the people  
& workplace  
department

This report was prepared by Alberta Human Resources and Employment  
and the Alberta Food Processors Association.

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Spring 2001

**ALBERTA**  
food processors association

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# Stronger Partners, Better Practices: A Success Story

from the Local Labour Market Partnerships Program

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Stronger Partners, Better Practices* is a celebration of an effective partnership that began with a small group of organizations who committed to working together. These organizations included: the Alberta Food Processors Association; Alberta Human Resources and Employment; Alberta Learning; Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and NorQuest College. They came together because of their shared vision of assisting the Alberta agri-food sector in meeting the challenge of becoming a \$20 billion/year processing and a \$10 billion/year production sector. This partnership enabled the group to increase their collective financial resources almost four-fold.

The vehicle for nurturing this partnership was Alberta Human Resources and Employment's Local Labour Market Partnerships program (LLMP). It was through the utilization of this program that a partnership developed, a greater network flourished and capacity began to build for a strong human resource development strategy within the food and beverage processing industry in Alberta.

During the first three years of this partnership the "groundwork" was laid, the "framework" was developed and the "brickwork" began. Many factors played a role in making this partnership a huge success. These "winning conditions" form the basis of "winning partnerships" and include:

- making the right connections
- moving at the right time
- focusing on the industry
- keeping it flexible
- enlisting a champion
- building a network
- doing the research
- communicating the results
- building on what is learned and;
- sustaining the momentum.

This report documents the results that may be achieved when a government-designed program, like the Local Labour Market Partnerships program, is effectively put to work to serve the needs of a "community".

## GLOSSARY

**AFPA** (Alberta Food Processors Association) is an industry association established to provide services that enhance, promote, inform, educate and develop Alberta businesses operating in the food and beverage industry.

**AHRE** (Alberta Human Resources and Employment) is a department of the provincial government that provides a continuum of services that assist people in need, help individuals succeed in the workforce, and foster safe and healthy workplaces.

**Essential Skills** are those skills that allow people to perform the tasks required in their occupations and provide them with the foundation for learning job – specific skills. They include skills such as reading, writing, oral communication, problem solving, and computer use.

**Human Resources Strategy** is the method used to prepare and compile programs to improve the workforce. In the context of this report, this refers to the programs planned by AHRE in conjunction with the AFPA to identify the skills necessary for individuals to succeed in the food sector, as well as the plans which are developed to allow people to gain these skills.

**Labour Market Analysis** is the study of trends in the workforce and the use of this information to provide forecasts for various industries.

**Labour Market Development** involves the education and training of the workforce to allow them to do their jobs better.

**LMDA** (Labour Market Development Agreement) is an agreement between the federal government and the Alberta government where the Alberta government accepts responsibility for the design and delivery of employment programs and services.

**Skills Shortages** are the gaps that exist between the current skills of those in the workforce and the skills necessary for individuals to work most efficiently.

**Youth Connections** is a provincially funded program which offers career planning and counselling, access to labour market information, assistance with job matching and opportunities for job shadowing. The program is open to youth aged 16 to 24 who are unemployed or underemployed and have not completed post-secondary education.

It is a story of shared vision, collective strength and increased capacity building.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to tell the story of a successful partnership. It is a story of shared vision, collective strength and increased capacity building that started when a group of people agreed to work together. It is a story of how this partnership laid the foundation for a network of relationships that, together, achieved results far beyond initial expectations. Stories like these deserve to be told: to celebrate, to learn and to ensure it can happen again.

Alberta Human Resources and Employment is proud to present *Stronger Partners, Better Practices*, a chronicle of its partnership with the Alberta Food Processors Association through the Local Labour Market Partnerships program (LLMP). An examination of the foundation, principles and outcomes of this partnership concludes with a discussion of effective practices to position local labour market initiatives for greatest benefit.

## SETTING THE SCENE

### Alberta's Food and Beverage Industry

The food and beverage processing industry is a major player in the Alberta economy. As the second largest manufacturing industry in the province, food and beverage processing accounted for 21% of Alberta's manufacturing shipments, over \$1.6 billion in exports and 19,300 direct jobs in 1997. Figure 1 indicates how these jobs are distributed between seven major sub-sectors of the industry.

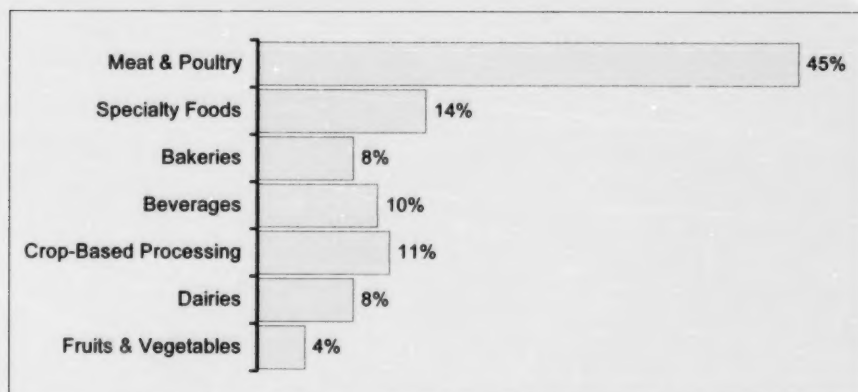


Figure 1: Alberta Food and Beverage Companies – Distribution by Employment  
(Source: Statistics Canada, 1996)

The Alberta agri-food industry has considerable potential for growth. While the province is one of Canada's largest food producing regions (second only to Ontario), it remains relatively underdeveloped as a processor and marketer of consumer ready products. In 1995, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development issued a major challenge to the Alberta agri-food sector: to become a \$20 billion processing and a \$10 billion production sector by 2005. That goal represented a threefold increase from current levels of food processing activity and remains a major growth challenge for the industry.

In order for such growth to occur, the industry identified two critical requirements:

- increase food processing activity by developing markets, implementing better food safety and quality assurance programs, and improving efficiency.

The demands of rapid growth and diversification as well as the need to attract, retain and enhance the skills of the workforce in a tight labour market

Increased international competition; ongoing mergers and consolidation; rigorous regulatory environments

There was mutual interest in building a long term relationship.

- increase the value added to raw materials by researching and processing technologies, developing new products, expanding marketing activities and using technological innovation.

Finding enough workers, and enough workers with the right skills to do the job, was a significant challenge.<sup>1</sup>

The demands of rapid growth and diversification as well as the need to attract, retain and enhance the skills of the workforce in a tight labour market are not the only challenges facing the food and beverage industry. Increased international competition; ongoing mergers and consolidation; rigorous regulatory environments governing workplace health and safety, food safety and environmental compliance; and relentless technological advancements in food production, processes and information systems are just a few of the forces for change in this industry.

In 1997, the Alberta Food Processors Association, representing more than 350 food and beverage processors in the province, knew that the industry faced significant obstacles in rising to meet these challenges. The majority of companies were small- or medium-sized companies that lacked resources or time to invest in training and development. Few companies had the resources or expertise to engage in comprehensive, strategic human resources development planning and implementation. Something needed to be done to create a set of goals to act as a focus for the industry. Individual companies looked to their industry association for help.

In the fall of that year, the Alberta Food Processors Association (AFPA) started to articulate its vision for concentrated and coordinated leadership in human resource development. To realize this vision, the association required support from others, especially financial partners. Ken Gibson, President and CEO of AFPA met with the Honorable Clint Dunford, then Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development and now Minister of Alberta Human Resources and Employment, to present the association's vision for the future. The government's priority to diversify the Alberta economy had been communicated and the food processing industry was a growing sector. There was mutual interest in building a long term relationship. The Minister supported the vision and agreed to help. The Local Labour Market Partnerships program provided the perfect vehicle to provide that assistance.

### **The Local Labour Market Partnerships Program**

On December 6, 1996 the Alberta Government became the first province to sign a Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) with the federal government as represented by Human Resources Development Canada. Under this agreement, Alberta assumed responsibility for the design and delivery of labour market programs and services to Employment Insurance clients and other eligible Albertans.

<sup>1</sup> Toma and Bouma Management Consultants. *The Pursuit of Quality: A Sustainable Growth Strategy for the Alberta Agri-Food Sector*, 1997.

In response to this agreement, Alberta, as represented by Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development (now represented by Alberta Human Resources and Employment), developed a comprehensive system of Alberta labour market programs and services. One of the programs designed to address the needs of this client group was the Local Labour Market Partnerships (LLMP) program. Implementation of these programs and services began in the fall of 1997 with the transfer of adequate funding and staff resources from the federal government.

LLMP provides support to community partners to identify, develop and implement labour force adjustment and human resources strategies.

LLMP provides support to community partners to identify, develop and implement labour force adjustment and human resources strategies. For the purposes of this program "community" is broadly defined by a common interest/focus of several partners. That is, community may refer to a location or region (e.g. Red Deer area) or to an industry/interest sector, such as the arts community or the agri-food sector.

Founded on key principles of cooperation, partnership and flexibility, the Local Labour Market Partnerships program has two major objectives: to support alliances among like-minded community partners who actively contribute to labour market development; and to encourage outside involvement in meeting employment needs by leveraging resources of the community. The fit for AFPA was obvious: they had already begun the work of articulating industry-wide (community) needs and, as an employer association representing companies large and small across the province, AFPA was well positioned to form alliances across the industry.

Projects supported or initiated through this program are expected to result in stronger community partnerships for job growth planning and ensuring that future positions will be filled. This in turn will lead to improved strategic planning for labour market development and will allow for increased opportunities for clients to address the specific labour needs within their community. Again, these outcomes aligned perfectly with AFPA's vision to lead the industry in its approach to human resources development.

## **A PARTNERSHIP BEGINS**

In June 1998, the Alberta Food Processors Association entered into a three-year local labour market partnership with Alberta Human Resources and Employment. AHRE provided AFPA with funding for three years to research, plan and develop a human resource development strategy. They hoped to research and define effective practices for the industry as well as to plan methods to put these strategies in place. While AFPA would be closely monitored and accountable for how these funds would be used, the exact objectives of the program and how the Association would meet these goals were not entirely defined. This was no oversight – Local Labour Market Partnerships principles of cooperation, partnership and flexibility allowed AFPA to make decisions about what would best suit the needs of the community it served.

In June 1998, the Alberta Food Processors Association entered into a three-year local labour market partnership with Alberta Human Resources and Employment.

AFPA chose to invest in a position, and in the person of Janet Henderson, who became Manager, Human Resources Industry Development. It would be Ms. Henderson's job to nurture the relationships required to achieve a strategic, coordinated and comprehensive approach to human resource development in Alberta's food and beverage processing industry.

## CAPACITY BUILDS

### Year One – "Groundwork"

The first priority was (and still is) to **learn**.

Initially, the AFPA partnership focused on three areas: helping youth connect to the labour market, identifying education and training needs and opportunities, and connecting members to resources. Ms. Henderson met these goals, and more, by focusing on the business needs of the industry first and then leveraging partnerships with other organizations that shared a stake in these issues. The first priority was (and still is) to **learn**. What is the main business of this industry? What products are produced? What services are offered? What factors are affecting the industry, internally and externally? Who are the key players and what is holding their attention? What does the industry need to meet its goals and who are potential partners in addressing these needs?

The initial partnership with Alberta Human Resources and Employment enabled AFPA to leverage other relationships.

Answering these questions required getting out into the community and touring worksites, meeting face-to-face with employers, workers and union representatives. Ms. Henderson met with associations in related sectors (e.g. foodservices) and groups focusing on one sub-sector of the industry (e.g. the beef sector). She met with associations that have a similar mandate in other provinces and states. She met with organizations that serve the industry, such as job placement agencies, educational institutions, consulting firms and government departments at the local and provincial level. She made countless presentations to raise awareness about the industry and ensured an AFPA presence at job fairs and trade shows. And so, the network slowly started to grow.

In addition to building relationships and awareness, AFPA was careful to respond to immediate needs identified by industry members.

This foundation of knowledge and relationships became the platform for a strategic, systemic response to industry needs. As common interests and shared vision were identified, AFPA formed strategic alliances with other organizations to achieve common goals. The initial partnership with Alberta Human Resources and Employment enabled AFPA to build other relationships. Key partners in the first year included the Alberta Workforce Essential Skills (AWES) Committee, Alberta Learning, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, NorQuest College and Hammond and Associates Inc. (See Appendix 1: Key Partners and Players in the Partnership for descriptions of each organization)

In addition to building relationships and awareness, AFPA was careful to respond to needs identified by industry members. One pressing issue was the challenge of finding skilled workers in a tight labour market. Another was the implementation of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) food safety system. Companies were struggling to achieve HACCP recognition

before a looming deadline or risk losing their export privileges. By responding directly and immediately to these issues AFPA built confidence, trust and a reputation as a responsive and practical resource for employers. Specific deliverables that resulted include:

- *Essential Skills and HACCP*, a review of HACCP implementation in the province, conducted in partnership with AWES. This resulted in the *Frontline HACCP* training resource and the *Frontline Train-the-Trainer Seminar*, created in partnership with Alberta Learning and NorQuest College. An Industry Advisory Council comprised of representatives from nine food processors, one labour organization and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency guided the development of these integrated, customized tools for industry trainers.
- *Hot Job Profiles*, descriptions of twelve high-growth occupations in the industry targeted at youth. These profiles were posted on the AFPA website ([www.afpa.com](http://www.afpa.com)) and featured at Youth Connections Centres across the province.
- communications pieces designed to promote awareness of the industry and the issues, showing how AFPA was positioning to address them.

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At the conclusion of Year One, the Alberta Food Processors Association had completed an environmental scan of the industry and laid the groundwork for human resources development. The landscape was more clearly defined, revealing issues, challenges, players, stakeholders and partners. All of these would be essential factors in positioning human resources development for the industry.

## **Year Two – “Framework”**

Year One laid a foundation of issues and challenges, while Year Two focused on framing the solutions. Hard data was required to demonstrate the needs and define the solutions for the industry. After a review of Year One outcomes, Alberta Human Resources and Employment supported research plans for Year Two. AFPA commenced planning for two industry-wide studies collectively known as the Human Resources Development Initiative. This initiative was actually a coalition of two parallel but complementary studies leading to recommendations for strategic human resource development. (See Figure 2)



Figure 2: AFPA Human Resource Development Initiative

Multiple partners came together to achieve what none of them could do in isolation.

Here again, multiple partners came together to achieve what none of them could do in isolation. The Labour Market Study was funded by Alberta Human Resources and Employment with contributions in kind from Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Alberta Learning. The Essential Skills Needs Assessment was funded by the National Literacy Secretariat and Alberta Learning, with contributions in kind from the Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Committee and NorQuest College. An Industry Advisory Council comprised of eleven food processors, two unions, and four representatives of industry associations and government agencies guided both studies. (See Appendix 2 for a complete listing of Advisory Committee members)

One of the members of the advisory council spoke for others in describing how this kind of collaborative effort was possible:

*We had to put underlying interests on the table. We put aside our personal agendas to work on the issues. We recognized we had a problem to solve. We knew we needed to address it and prioritize solutions.*

– Eileen Teslenko, Business Agent, Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union, Local 252.

The Labour Market Study was intended to:

- assess industry trends and implications for the industry
- identify current and future characteristics of the food processing sector including forecasting job openings, employment scenarios, emerging occupations and potential sources of labour

The Essential Skills Needs Assessment was intended to:

- identify potential skill gaps and training gaps
- profile and define essential skills requirements for key occupations and training programs
- determine the barriers to, and the supports required for, essential skills development

This research collected input from employers, workers and union representatives in over one hundred and fifty companies from every sector of the industry in twenty-two Alberta communities. Key findings of the research included:

- the industry requires a large number of new employees to meet growth opportunities
- attracting people and developing skills will be fundamental to industry growth
- jobs are becoming increasingly technical, requiring stronger essential skills
- training and development faces a variety of constraints, including :
  - 18% of the workforce speaks English as a second language (3rd highest in Canada)
  - 37% of the workforce has not completed high school (as high as 42% in some sectors)
  - 21% of senior managers in the industry have no more than a high school education
  - 44% of the workforce likely does not have the literacy and numeracy skills to cope with workplace change and continuous learning

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44% of the workforce likely does not have the literacy and numeracy skills to cope with workplace change and continuous learning

Two final reports published in March 2000 summarized the methodology, outcomes and recommendations of this research: *People...Pathways...Possibilities!! A Human Resources Study of Alberta's Food and Beverage Processing Industry*<sup>2</sup> and *Adding Skills, Adding Value: The Essential Skills Needs Assessment for Alberta's Food Processing Industry*<sup>3</sup>. Appendices 3 and 4 present highlights from each study.

<sup>2</sup> Toma and Bouma Management Consultants. *People...Pathways...Possibilities!! A Human Resources Study of Alberta's Food and Beverage Processing Industry*. Alberta Food Processors Association.

<sup>3</sup> Hammond and Associates Inc. *Adding Skills, Adding Value: The Essential Skills Needs Assessment for Alberta's Food Processing Industry*. Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Committee, Edmonton AB.

The studies served as a blueprint to address critical human resource issues.

The studies provided comprehensive and well-correlated recommendations that served as a blueprint to address critical human resource issues and defined a clear role for AFPA in leading this initiative. Specific recommendations included the need to:

- make a strong, clear and long term commitment to human resources development
- foster awareness and development of essential skills
- nurture a learning culture
- increase opportunities for workforce education
- overcome barriers to participation in training and development, and
- develop leadership skills for supervisors, managers and executives

Audiences from across government and industry began to take notice.

Audiences from across government and industry began to take notice as Ms. Henderson commenced a rigorous schedule of speaking engagements to communicate the results and implications of the research. Interest soon spread beyond the agri-food industry as well. For example, the process methodology used in the essential skills assessment was presented at the International Workplace Learning Conference in Dearborn, Michigan and has now been published and shared as a best practice model across Canada and the United States<sup>4</sup>.

Interest soon spread beyond the agri-food industry as well.

While the Human Resource Initiative was the focus of Year Two, it is important to note that AFPA continued to expand its network and response to industry and community needs during this time. HACCP training expanded to include a full suite of technical training and Occupational Health and Safety programs. Ms. Henderson assisted more than fifty companies with recruitment and served in an advisory capacity for several employment agencies and post-secondary institutions, including Bow Valley College, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, Olds College, the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, McBride Career Services, the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta.

The Alberta Food Processors Association, Alberta Human Resources and Employment and their growing circle of partners began the third year of the partnership

### Year Three – “Brickwork”

The Alberta Food Processors Association, Alberta Human Resources and Employment and their growing circle of partners began the third year of the partnership with a solid foundation of industry knowledge and networks and a framework of recommendations to support human resources development. Now it was time to start building – to construct the programs and the systems needed to address the issues. Communicating the results of the research and maximizing established networks to create systemic solutions were the top priorities.

<sup>4</sup> Hammond, Karen and Bennett, Karen, *Sectoral Needs Assessment: A Process for Essential Skills Analysis*, Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Committee, Edmonton, AB.

Word of the human resource initiative spread through numerous channels, such as featured articles in Profile, the magazine of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce and SkillNet.ca, a federal government website documenting daily prospects in Canada's labour market. Presentations were made to numerous individuals and organizations, including Premier Ralph Klein and the Alberta Economic Development Authority, the Council of Presidents of post-secondary institutions, the Alberta Agriculture and Food Council and the Alberta Value Added Corporation.

One of the first outcomes of the research was the establishment of the Workplace Training and Development Program at NorQuest College. This program was made possible through funding from Alberta Learning and provides AFPA members with access to existing training programs and to the services of a professional language training consultant. Through this program, companies may access free services to assist them with in-house training, language training and plain-language revision of training materials and company documents. Following a successful pilot, the program will be continuing for a second year with funding from the National Literacy Secretariat.

Today, new partners are still joining the network to assist AFPA with human resource development in Alberta's agri-food industry. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AAFRD) leveraged Federal Farm Re-Investment Funding to establish the Leadership Initiative, which includes a training bursary for senior managers and a series of management/leadership seminars for owner/operators, middle managers and other high-performing employees. Discussions are also under way to establish comprehensive training and human resources support for developing skills of production line workers.

At the time of this report, the story is far from over. AFPA is reorganizing and expanding its organizational structure to include a Vice President in charge of Quality and Safety, in addition to Ms. Henderson's position, now entitled Vice President of Training and Development. Much of the agenda for this year's annual general meeting is dedicated to the strength and diversity of AFPA's training and development initiatives and plans are in progress for a communications launch to ensure the word keeps spreading. Good news is worth talking about. So are strong partners and better practices.

## **THE WINNING CONDITIONS**

All stakeholders agree that the Alberta Food Processors Association partnership with Alberta Human Resources and Employment has been a certain success, exceeding original expectations of all parties. While the full fruits of this labour are still maturing, it is certain that workers, employers and a host of others will all share in the harvest. What is the secret to their success? What lessons can we learn from their story? That question was posed to key players in this initiative in an effort to deduce some best practices for similar industry-government partnerships. Ten common themes emerged. While the alchemy may lie in how all of these factors combine, they are certainly important elements in the formula.

Good partnerships  
start with good  
partners.

## 1. Make the Right Connections

Good partnerships start with good partners. Good partners share a common vision and an understanding that by working together, they can realize this vision more fully and/or more quickly than they can in isolation. Good partners need each other and are both willing to invest in realizing this goal while adhering to shared values regarding the process and the product. Good partners are able to bring resources to the table, leveraging other contacts and potential partners at the same time. Good partners have the trust and respect of their communities and the authority or potential to effect change in their spheres of influence.

In the case of this partnership, AFPA, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Alberta Learning and Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development were all interested in supporting human resources development in the food and beverage industry. AFPA had already invested time and effort into baseline research and had established credibility in the industry as a neutral and central voice for the industry. The Association, however, lacked the financial resources to support a full-time position to lead this challenge. AHRE could leverage the financial support but lacked both intensive, internal knowledge of the industry and access to key players. Alberta Learning and Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development could offer extensive networks of educators, consultants and content experts but they too needed an 'internal champion', well connected to the industry. AHRE had the Local Labour Market Partnerships program in place to respond to this need, and contacts with numerous government agencies that could provide information and assistance.

## 2. Move at the Right Time

Industry-government partnerships work best when they are initiated at the request of industry members. A key factor in this partnership was the fact that employers, union representatives and other stakeholders in the industry had already recognized the need for human resources development and were calling on AFPA to help. Pushing through a development initiative before a significant percentage of primary stakeholders (employers and workers) see a need for it may be premature. This requires patience from both parties but, as stated in *Adding Skills, Adding Value*, "awareness must come before acceptance, and acceptance before action". AFPA was able to demonstrate that the industry was behind them in this proposal.

"awareness must  
come before  
acceptance, and  
acceptance before  
action"

In addition to moving at the 'right' time, this partnership demonstrated the benefit of working at the 'same' time as well. That is, the Association was careful to meet immediate needs of companies and workers at the

<sup>5</sup> Hammond and Associates Inc. *Adding Skills, Adding Value: The Essential Skills Needs Assessment for Alberta's Food Processing Industry*. Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Committee, Edmonton AB, p. 63.

same time as it was working on long term solutions. This built confidence and trust in the industry that AFPA's approach was both practical and responsive.

### **3. Focus on the Industry**

Successful industry-government partnerships focus on the needs and goals of the industry and its workers, first and foremost. This requires an investment in learning about the industry beyond 'book learning'. AFPA's Manager of Human Resources, for example, spent considerable time touring production facilities and meeting with key stakeholders in the industry.

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foremost

Focusing on the industry requires a strategic approach to the issues, rather than focusing on the needs of one company versus another. It requires looking at the future of the industry and turning one's attention to what is holding the industry's attention. This was demonstrated early in the partnership when HACCP was found to be "front and centre" for many food and beverage processors. Rather than to attempt to draw their attention elsewhere, AFPA and AHRE showed how the broader issue of human resources could help solve the immediate issue of HACCP. It was the success of this upfront initiative that made later phases possible.

Focusing on the industry also means that the locus of control remains in industry hands. The Local Labour Market Partnerships program served Alberta's agri-food industry by providing arms-length support and seed capital, careful monitoring, approval of program objectives without dictating how they would be met. Consultation with industry was a core value of all activities in the partnership and meetings with industry were led by AFPA, as the industry partner.

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value of all activities.

### **4. Keep it Flexible**

The broad goals and guidelines of the Local Labour Market Partnerships program provided all partners with the flexibility to be truly innovative and creative in shaping a process and outcomes well-suited to the industry. The partnership started with purposefully broad objectives and the expectation that plans would likely change as issues emerged and understanding grew. The objectives were narrow enough to set a direction and evaluate outcomes but broad enough to allow a degree of latitude in their interpretation. Reporting requirements were kept to the minimum amount necessary to ensure accountability without bureaucracy. Both parties felt that the fluidity of the process was key to enlarging the network and maximizing the outcomes of the partnership.

The Local Labour  
Market Partnerships  
program provided all  
partners with the  
flexibility to be truly  
innovative and  
creative.

## 5. Enlist a Champion

An industry champion plays a pivotal role among the many players in an industry-government partnership. The term is used to denote the person or persons inside the industry who actively promote and 'champion' the work, benefits and potential of the partnership within the industry. There may of course be many champions with different degrees of involvement for one initiative. In this partnership, this role fell largely to one person: Janet Henderson, Vice President of Training and Development. AFPA, with AHRE's support, allowed this position to lead the cause, bring industry to the table, pull together partners and identify different funding mechanisms to continuously improve human resources development in the industry. In this role, Ms. Henderson represents industry as a whole. Alberta Human Resources and Employment provided the funds, but the job description and performance management were again up to the Association and to the AFPA President, to whom she reports.

An industry champion may not necessarily be paid for this role. This was the case in this partnership, due to the small staff and resources of the Association. As one stakeholder from Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development summarized: "A voluntary committee would never take it forward. You must create an internal industry champion and create the position to do it. Everyone else has full-time jobs. You need a position whose responsibility it is to bring this all together."

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What are the characteristics of an industry champion? Based on the AFPA experience, the ideal person to lead a similar industry-government partnership is:

- a "people-person", committed to networking and bringing other individuals and organizations together to address common goals
- a team player, willing to distribute leadership and share information/resources among members of the network
- a strategic thinker, focused on "big picture", systemic issues and solutions
- a change agent, able to lead and facilitate change in the industry
- a skilled and "savvy" communicator, able to use multiple media in spreading the word about the work
- knowledgeable about the industry or willing and able to obtain this knowledge
- well-connected, ideally to people and resources of both government and industry
- competent in project management, able to juggle multiple tasks and priorities
- principled, able to build and nurture the trust and confidence of all stakeholders.

Of all of these characteristics, Ms. Henderson suggests that networking and facilitating change are the primary qualifications for her work: "My job is to facilitate change. How do I do this? I 'disturb' the status quo, for lack of a better word. I set up the structure for change to happen. By structure, I mean identifying projects and forging relationships."

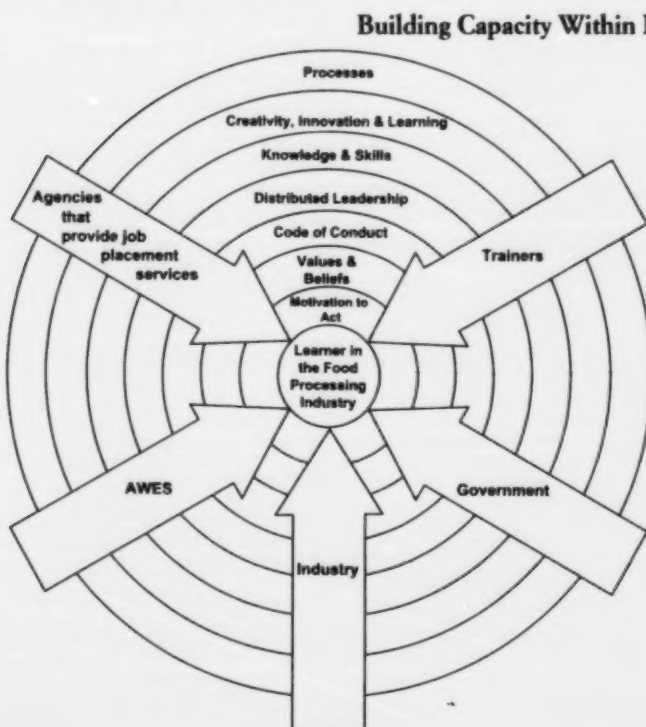
**"My job is to facilitate change. How do I do this? I 'disturb' the status quo, for lack of a better word. I set up the structure for change to happen. By structure, I mean identifying projects and forging relationships."**

## 6. Build a Network

Perhaps more than any other factor in the partnership, the expanding network of partners and stakeholders was and is key to its success. The contractual agreement between AFPA and AHRE was foundational but insufficient to address the complexity and number of issues in the industry. The Local Labour Market Partnerships funding was used as seed money to facilitate the formation of a "network" or "community of practice" where individuals with similar work roles and a common context work together in informal relationships. Stakeholders become interdependent in working toward a common goal while maintaining unique identities and perspectives. Membership in this network is fluid and dynamic, meant to change and evolve in response to changing needs. Leadership is dynamic as well, with different stakeholders playing a lead role at different points in the process.

**Membership in this network is fluid and dynamic, meant to change and evolve in response to changing needs.**

The following diagram was developed by stakeholders in the partnership as a visual model of the network of relationships that has emerged to serve the needs of learners in the industry, broadly defined as people working in and seeking employment in this sector. The arrows represent members or stakeholders and the concentric circles indicate shared values, attributes and enabling conditions.



**Learners** include both employed and job seekers.

**Industry** includes companies, organized labour and the Alberta Food Processors Association.

**AWES** is the Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Committee.

**Provincial Government** includes Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Alberta Learning, Alberta Economic Development, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

**Federal Government** includes Human Resources Development Canada, National Literacy Secretariat.

**Service Agencies** includes English as a second language (ESL), JOBS and other job placement agencies.

**Trainers** include public and private institutions, private consultants and not-for-profit groups.

In addition to shared purpose, members of a successful network share common values. All of the members of this network shared values of collaboration, synergy, lifelong learning and the fundamental value of people.

## **7. Do the Research**

The Local Labour Market Partnerships program places a strong emphasis on solid research as a necessary foundation for any change initiative. All partners in this initiative reaped the benefits of spending much of the first two years learning about the industry and investigating all of the issues, (current and emerging) from the perspective of all stakeholders (including workers). In the process, they were able to demonstrate a sincere interest in listening and responding to the needs of industry. They were able to expand the network of relationships and partners willing to address the outcomes of the research. And, they had the hard data they needed to leverage new partnerships and funding support for human resources development.

## **8. Communicate the Results**

Communicating the results of the research quickly, effectively and to key audiences was central to the success of the partnership. Key audiences included industry partners and other stakeholders who had participated in the research as well as workers, employers, industry associations and government agencies. A full-colour "Highlights of the Report" brochure was developed for distribution and executive summaries of both reports were posted on the AFPA website. The Manager of Human Resources, Industry Development developed a PowerPoint "road show" describing the objectives, methodology and results of the research and spoke to any group with a vested interest in the research. Meetings included presentations with key decision-makers and funding agencies in government, industry and education as part of a continuing strategy to build awareness of the issues and support for the solutions.

## **9. Build on What Is Learned**

As soon as practicable, it is important to provide clear evidence of a return on investment to those that participated in the research. Participants will be looking for practical outcomes to the research and the sooner you can demonstrate that return, the better. Key stakeholders need to be involved in shaping a "go forward strategy" which defines objectives, priorities and a workplan for implementing the recommendations of the research. In a sense, the work really begins at this point. A number of the industry members who assisted in the research of Years One and Two are now being joined by new industry partners who have been impressed by the work to date and are coming on board with implementation.

**Key stakeholders need to be involved in shaping a "go forward strategy"**

## 10. Sustain the Momentum

Alberta Human Resources and Employment made an initial commitment for a three-year partnership. Now in its third year, many of the outcomes of this partnership are just beginning to take shape. AHRE agreed that to withdraw support at this point might jeopardize actual implementation of systems and supports and has agreed to extend the partnership for a further two years. Sustaining the momentum warrants celebrating but not resting on what has been accomplished. All partners are committed to identifying new opportunities and working with an expanding network of partners to meet the ongoing challenge of human resources development in the agri-food industry.

Sustaining the momentum warrants celebrating but not resting on what has been accomplished.

## IN CONCLUSION

The Alberta Food Processors Association partnership with AHRE stands as a very positive example of how industry and government can work together to achieve outcomes that neither could achieve alone. Shared vision, shared values and a commitment to respond to emerging needs of the industry enabled these partners to achieve outcomes for all stakeholders far beyond original expectations. Theirs is a success worth celebrating.



# appendices

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## **APPENDIX 1: KEY PARTNERS AND PLAYERS IN THE PARTNERSHIP**

This appendix provides a brief description of selected partners who have played a key role in the success of the partnership. They are: Alberta Food Processors Association; the Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Committee; the Government of Alberta (through various departments); the Government of Canada; Hammond and Associates; and NorQuest College.

### **ALBERTA FOOD PROCESSORS ASSOCIATION (AFPA)**

Alberta Food Processors Association is a voluntary, non-profit industry organization committed to helping Alberta food and beverage companies compete successfully in the marketplace. AFPA represents member companies and the industry. AFPA represents all segments of the food and beverage industry throughout Alberta. AFPA has over three hundred and fifty members. Its mission is to provide services that enhance, promote, inform, educate, and develop Alberta business operating in the agri-food and beverage sector. The human resources business unit assists food-processing companies maximize their knowledge management system and develop a key competitive advantage, their human resources.

AFPA members include recent start-ups as well as large corporations. AFPA's role is to:

- Help its members capitalize on growth opportunities in Alberta and beyond
- Increase consumer awareness for both retail and food service through umbrella promotional programs
- Provide programs to help companies become stronger international competitors through market information, education, and networking

AFPA is headed by a virtual team of ten employees. AFPA focuses on four important areas:

- Helping processors promote Alberta Made products through advertising support, retail programs and international trade missions and seminars
- Assuring food safety and quality through HACCP and other programs
- Developing a highly skilled, motivated workforce to produce safer products, increase productivity and ensure a safer worksite
- Training and counseling services to reduce potential liability and cut costs

### **ALBERTA WORKFORCE ESSENTIAL SKILLS COMMITTEE**

The Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Committee vision is to promote the development of a confident, innovative and highly literate workforce in the province of Alberta. It is committed to the task of promoting and coordinating workplace essential skills training in Alberta and to developing a strategic view of essential skills training within a business and industry framework. AWES increases awareness of literacy and basic skill issues and helps employers, organized labour and individual workers find appropriate educational solutions. Members of AWES are drawn from business, labour and government and are supported with funding from the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada and Alberta Learning.

In realizing this vision, AWES' mission is to:

- Provide a forum in which to foster partnerships, facilitate networking opportunities, and promote collaboration
- Undertake activities that demonstrate the economic and social value of workforce literacy training and development
- Initiate and facilitate provincial networking opportunities for interested stakeholders
- Solicit input from and participation of stakeholders
- Respond to interest shown by potential workforce literacy partners
- Identify, contact and engage new partners and champions
- Research information and tools relevant to the workforce literacy needs of Alberta

Promote the professional development of workforce literacy practitioners in Alberta. Members of the AWES Committee at the time of this report are:

- Janet Henderson, Vice President of Training and Development, Alberta Food Processors Association
- Carolyn Dieleman, Manager of Language Training Programs, Alberta Learning
- Lloyd Campbell, Senior Advisor, Human and Organization Development, Syncrude Canada Ltd.
- Mike Desautels, Regional Representative, Canadian Labour Congress
- Micky Runcer, Education Director, United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 401

## **GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA**

Several provincial government departments are involved in this network. The initial partnership originated in the former Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development. Advanced Education and Career Development had always been interested in labour market trends, quality of the labour market, training programs, getting people to work and human resources issues. Through the re-organization in 1999, Advanced Education and Career Development was split into Alberta Learning and Alberta Human Resources and Employment. Recommendations in the studies have an indirect, but long term, impact for these departments.

### **Alberta Human Resources and Employment**

Alberta Human Resources and Employment focuses on ensuring Alberta's people, communities and workplaces are safe, healthy, responsible and productive. This department seeks to contribute to the Alberta Advantage by working with partners to assist Albertans in reaching their full potential in society and in the economy, to foster safe, fair, productive and innovative workplaces, and to support those in need. The Local Labour Market Partnerships program is an initiative of Alberta Human Resources and Employment.

## **Alberta Learning**

The mission of Alberta Learning is to provide leadership and work with partners to build a globally recognized lifelong learning community that enables Albertans to be responsible, caring, creative, self-reliant and contributing members of a knowledge-based and prosperous society. In realizing a vision to "optimize human potential", the department focuses on three core businesses:

- Basic learning
- Adult learning
- Apprenticeship and industry training

## **Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development**

The mission of AAFRD is to enable the growth of a globally competitive, sustainable agriculture and food industry through essential policy, legislation, information and services.

Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is primarily responsible for the growth and development of the food industry from a government perspective and human resource development is part of their mandate. Development officers have a facilitation role in assessing how business is going and identifying issues related to competing in this industry. Their role includes a breadth of issues from marketing, to plant layout to environmental issues.

## **GOVERNMENT OF CANADA**

### **National Literacy Secretariat**

Part of Human Resources Development Canada, the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) works to promote literacy as an essential component for a learning society and to make Canada's social, economic and political life more accessible to people with weak literacy skills.

The NLS has two funding streams. Through its federal provincial/territorial funding stream, it sponsors projects which are dedicated to regional or local needs. Through its national funding stream, it supports projects in partnership with a variety of non-governmental and voluntary organizations, literacy and non-literacy groups, and businesses and labour organizations. Broadly speaking, initiatives with these groups address an issue or a concern of relevance to literacy in Canada from a national perspective. The NLS funds the work of the Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Committee and, through them, funded the bulk of the Essential Skills Needs Assessment for AFPA.

## **HAMMOND AND ASSOCIATES INC.**

Hammond and Associates is a Calgary-based consulting firm specializing in performance consulting, communications and training. The firm's principal, Karen Hammond, has extensive experience in diverse industries. Karen has worked closely with the Association in all phases of the partnership. In Year One she co-facilitated the *Essential Skills and HACCP* study and developed the *Hot Job Profiles*, *Frontline HACCP* and the *Frontline HACCP Train-the-Trainer Seminar*. In Year Two, Karen was project manager for the province-wide essential skills needs assessment and chief writer/editor for the *Adding Skills, Adding Value* report. She also co-authored *Sectoral Needs Assessment: A Process for Essential Skills*. In Year Three, Karen conducted the needs assessment and developed the program

design for AFPA's Leadership Initiative. She continues to work closely with AFPA in implementing recommendations of the Human Resources Initiative.

### **NORQUEST COLLEGE**

NorQuest College is a public, board-governed Alberta post-secondary institution with specialized expertise in academic upgrading, English language training, career and skills training, and learner support and development. The College has been a leader in the area of workplace essential skills development, offering English in the Workplace, literacy in the workplace and Essential Skills Needs Assessments to numerous companies over the past two decades. As such, the involvement in the AFPA network was a natural fit for NorQuest, providing an opportunity to reach and serve learners that fit the College mandate. The College was able to provide not only process expertise, but also technical support in the area of printing and production. The College also provides project management and essential skills content expertise for AWES, with funding from the National Literacy Secretariat and Alberta Learning.

## APPENDIX 2: INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Industry Advisory Committee for the Human Resources Initiative was formed to provide input and guide the research on essential skills needs and the labour market. The Committee included representatives from government, labour and businesses in all sectors of the industry.

| Organization                                                      | Representative                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada                                  | Lorrie McFadden, Marketing and Trade Officer                |
| Agriculture and Food Council                                      | Jerry Stepnisky, Executive Director, CARDF                  |
| Alberta Food Processors Association                               | Janet Henderson, Vice President of Training and Development |
| Alberta Value Added Corporation                                   | Dan Fullerton, Senior Investment Officer                    |
| API Grain Processors                                              | Ed Grose, HR Coordinator                                    |
| Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco and Grain Millers Union Local 252  | Eileen (Clancy) Teslenko, Business Agent                    |
| C/A Meats                                                         | Chad Wester, Owner                                          |
| Cargill Foods Ltd.                                                | Les Icton, Human Resources Manager                          |
| FNA Foods Ltd.                                                    | Konrad Baarda, President, COO                               |
| Henrickson-Szkambara Foods                                        | Linda Jabs, Owner                                           |
| Hostess Frito Lay                                                 | Heather VanderSchaaf, Human Resources Manager               |
| Lamb-Weston, A Division of Con Agra                               | Douglas Carle, HR Development Manager and Counsel           |
| Pak-Wel Produce                                                   | Maude Fortin, Plant Manager                                 |
| Parmalat Canada – Refrigerated Products Division                  | Denis Gagne, Director of Human Resources, Western Canada    |
| Pepsi Bottling Group                                              | Denise Bodnaryk, HR Manager                                 |
| United Food And Commercial Workers International Union Local 373A | Rick Bailey, Business Representative                        |
| Weston Bakeries                                                   | Kevin Haase, Production Manager                             |

## **APPENDIX 3: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FINAL REPORT: ADDING SKILLS, ADDING VALUE: THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR ALBERTA'S FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRY**

For the full report, refer to *Adding Skills, Adding Value: The Essential Skills Needs Assessment for Alberta's Food Processing Industry* by the Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Committee.

### **The Essential Skills Needs Assessment for Alberta's Food Processing Industry – Some Statistics**

- 37.3% of workers in this industry, and 22% of plant managers, have no more than a grade 12 education
- An estimated 45% of the workforce likely does not have the literacy or numeracy skills to cope with workplace change
- 18.2 % of the industry's workforce and as high as 75% of employees in some plants speak English as a second language
- Less than 1% of companies surveyed had offered essential skills training

### **The Challenge**

The food processing industry in Alberta is preparing for a future characterized by continued growth and relentless change. Managing these changes will require a flexible workforce with the skills and confidence to continually adapt to new processes, new technology, new markets, new skills and new ways of thinking.

### **The Response**

The Alberta Workforce Essential Skills (AWES) Committee and the Alberta Food Processors Association (AFPA) conducted an Essential Skills Needs Assessment to examine the industry's readiness to meet the challenge of change. The study focused on essential skills like reading, writing, computer literacy, problem-solving and oral communication as the foundation for workplace learning and training.

Representatives from eighty-three small, medium and large food processors in twenty-two Alberta communities participated in interviews and focus groups. This sample amounted to 14% of all food processors in Alberta and 29% of companies employing more than twenty-five workers. In addition, the research team interviewed labour representatives and other stakeholders, reviewed census data and related studies in agri-foods and interviewed training providers in the industry.

### **The Results**

The needs assessment presented six key issues and corresponding recommendations aimed at workforce development in Alberta's food processing industry. In summary:

- Many companies, especially smaller operations, lack the resources, expertise and vision for human resources development.
- The industry needs to nurture a training culture, overcoming multiple barriers that include limited time, funds or government support for workplace training.

- A large percentage of the food processing workforce will be challenged by a progression to more technical, less labour intensive work, requiring a higher level of essential skills.
- The large number of workers who speak English as a second language face particular barriers and challenges.
- Many employers reported difficulty finding workers with required skills, and called for stronger consultation with training providers and employment agencies.
- Front line supervisors, lead hands and senior managers at the plant level require new skills and more flexible training opportunities.

## **APPENDIX 4: HIGHLIGHTS FROM: PEOPLE...PATHWAYS...POSSIBILITIES!!**

### **A HUMAN RESOURCES STUDY OF ALBERTA'S FOOD AND BEVERAGE PROCESSING INDUSTRY**

For the full report, refer to *People...Pathways...Possibilities!! A Human Resources Study of Alberta's Food and Beverage Processing Industry* by the Alberta Food Processors Association.

#### **Background to the Study**

The Alberta food and beverage processing industry has considerable potential for growth. Within Canada, Alberta is second only to Ontario as a primary food producer. Yet its food and beverage processing sector remains underdeveloped by comparison.

In 1995, when the Minister of Agriculture challenged the industry to achieve a goal of \$20 billion in annual output (from \$6.2 billion), human resource development was identified as a critical constraint to growth. The constraint has two dimensions:

- The need to substantially increase the actual level of food processing activity taking place within the industry – a result of further market development, the implementation of food safety and quality assurance programs and improvements in operations and efficiencies.
- The need to increase the value being added to the raw materials – a result of research, new product development, marketing and technical innovation.

For this purpose, the Alberta Food Processors Association, with funding and support from Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Alberta Agriculture Food and Rural Development and Alberta Learning has taken the lead to address these challenges.

#### **Study Approach**

The Human Resources Development Study undertook a detailed assessment of human resources development and labour market issues, opportunities and constraints in the Alberta food and beverage processing sector. Specifically the study undertook:

- a detailed review of available statistics;
- case study analysis of seven food and beverage subsectors including meat processing, crop processing, dairy, beverages, fruit and vegetables and specialty involving twenty-five interviews with large and medium scaled processors. These processors account for nearly 25 % of the total workforce employed in the sector;
- focus group interviews with small-scaled food processors in Grande Prairie, Edmonton, Calgary and Lethbridge; as well as with two employee groups;
- a comparative analysis of training approaches in other jurisdictions;
- a documentation of training programs available to the industry.

## Key Findings

The human resource study illustrates that the Alberta food and beverage industry requires a large number of new employees to meet growth opportunities and to deal with the issue of turnover. In order of magnitude, these requirements fall into four general areas:

- Labourers (or production workers) – the largest requirement – specifically in the meat and bakery sub-sectors. Total sector employment – currently at 19,800 is estimated to rise to over 26,000 by 2005 – an increase of 6,200 employees. However, employee retention and turnover are major issues for this industry. To fill these new positions and to offset the losses due to turnover, more than 18,000 people need to be attracted to the industry over the next five years.
- Machine Operators – a growing and specialized requirement. While numbers are not particularly large, specialized operators are required to run equipment that is increasingly specialized. (There are also requirements for apprentices and journey persons for maintenance and machine operating positions).
- Supervisors – to provide supervision, team building and communications.
- Management/management trainees – to provide leadership and 'business building' requirements.

Current levels of unemployment among manufacturing workers stands at 3.6 % (4 % is considered full employment). Thus the Alberta food and beverage industry will have considerable difficulty filling these positions.

Specific to employee training, requirements fall into three main areas:

- Operational Support for production workers. This support is required to address areas such as (but not limited to) workplace safety, food safety procedures, first aid, process control and HACCP.
- Supervisory Skills particularly as these relate to the supervision of employees, the provision of team leadership skills, communications and the ability to deal with cross-cultural issues and a diverse workforce.
- Management Training skills pertaining to leadership, business strategy, marketing, human resource management, technology development and implementation.

Overall, the respondents indicated that training courses available to industry are not lacking. However, a number of constraints and obstacles to the adoption and implementation of training appear to exist. These include:

- The time available for training is a key constraint. Many food and beverage processing companies are under enormous pressure and have little time to consider the offering of training programs.
- Training as a priority within the industry is low. Based on the interview findings, human resource management and development is not a high priority.
- Institutions such as the regional colleges offer a variety of courses but do not appear to be well connected to the food processing industry. This is evident based on the lack of awareness among many of the respondents with local or regional educational institutions.
- Traditional delivery methods such as classroom programs, Internet or on-line learning for production workers are not appropriate in many situations. Again, time is a serious constraint. Furthermore, many companies do not have the facilities or are not in a position to offer on-line

services to their employees. Finally, many employees working in the food and beverage processing have either low levels of educational attainment or do not have basic English language skills.

### **Implications**

The Alberta food and beverage processing industry faces a major challenge. If it is to become a \$20 billion industry, substantial new growth must occur. This will require strong leadership, innovative product and market development, a strong commitment to food safety and quality assurance and a significant increase in actual food and beverage processing.

Fundamental to the growth of the industry is the issue of attracting and developing human resources. This will require industry action. Without such action, the Alberta food and beverage processing industry's growth potential will be constrained. In view of the tight labour markets already characteristic of Alberta, the food and beverage industry will experience even greater difficulty in the future without an effective human resources strategy.

The study findings clearly illustrate that the Alberta food and beverage processing industry faces a human resource limit. Failure to address the issue will constrain the industry's potential to grow. Furthermore, and perhaps even more alarming, is the possibility that the industry may be challenged just to maintain current levels of employment and economic activity.